CANADA FOR THE CANADIANS

ADDRESS

Delivered to the Canadian Club of Montreal,
March 22nd, 1909

BY

PROFESSOR JOHN COX, M.A., LL.D.
OF McGILL UNIVERSITY.

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Mr. President, and Mem' rs of the Canadian Club;

I appreciate very highly the extraordinarily kind words in which you, Sir, have introduced me to this gathering which contains so many of my friends; and the honour which you have done me in asking me to address you before I leave Canada. In truth, you do us of the University altogether too much honour at these meetings. We cannot appear without being haled up to the high table, and though many of you must have had occasion long ago to become tired of our voices, you ask us to speak out of all proportion more frequently than our numbers would justify. But we are not puffed up. For the truth will out—in unguarded moments. Some time ago I was dining with one of your most prominent business men, and my very good friend, and he took occasion to attack Mr. Arthur Balfour in characteristically trenchant manner; so trenchantly that though I detest Balfour's politics, I felt bound to say something on his behalf as a man, upon the basis of a very slight personal acquaintance. But my friend would not have it. 'No,' he said, 'I have no use for him, Balfour is a *futile* person.' And then came the illuminating flash. 'Now I tell you what! He'd make a very good man of yo r sort—a professor, you know!' A political friend who was present thought to improve matters by recalling Lord Palmerston's remark—was it not?—that the Germans were a nation of damned professors. But here it seemed to me that he chose his ground badly, and I coul t help pointing out that we professors have one advantage in that when we have occasion to allude to the politicians we are saved the trouble of putting in the qualification.

But, gentlemen, I was conscious of the little rift we occasionally hear of between the academic and the business worlds, when it came to the choice of a topic in which you could be interested and I could have anything to say. Fortunately there appeared at this moment the very weighty report of the North American Conference on the conservation of national resources, and I chose the phrase 'Canada for the Canadians' as a title under which I could urge upon your attention this most striking and importa t document. But last week you had it expounded to you by Hon. Sidney Fisher, who represented us at the Conference, with far greater authority than I could bring to the task. Nevertheless, so vital is the subject in my j dgment, I shall venture to re-enforce the minister's address with one or two illustrations, before saying some

things of perhaps deeper and more general import which I wish to get said before leaving.

But first let me brush aside in a word or two that use of the phrase Canada for the Canadians in which it is the parrot-cry of a stupid provincialism. We in the University often catch an echo of it in connection with new appointments. Now I have had something to say in the selection of several colleagues who have brought great distinction to McGill; and I can tell you that the only consideration which weighs with the present authorities is this, to find the best man come he from where he may. That is how we brought Professor Callendar from England and Professor Rutherford from New Zealand. And when we felt that in Dr. Barnes, a Canadian, we had the best possible man, we were the more delighted to make the appointment without troubling to look abroad. That is a policy to be supported at all costs. Canada needs and must have the best. It is poor patriotism to fob her off with the second best because of the local accident of birth. It may be necessary to protect manufactures in a young country; but for heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't put a tariff on brains. You will not even succeed in establishing a monopoly by it!

No, gentlemen, the sense in which I intended to use the phrase was far different. As I read it, it should be 'All Canada for all Canadians' to the exclusion of monopoly in the interests of individuals or limited classes. Take this admirable sentence from the first paragraph of the Report:—

"We recognize as natural resources all materials available for the use of man as means of life and welfare, including those on the surface of the earth, like the soil and the waters; those below the surface, like the minerals; and those above the surface like the forests." Doesn't it sound like Genesis? "We agree that these resources should be developed, used, and conserved for the future, in the interests of mankind, whose rights and duties to guard and control the natural sources of life and welfare are inherent, perpetual, and indefeasible.

We agree that those resources which are necessaries of life should be regarded as public utilities, that their ownership entails specific duties to the public, and that as far as possible effective measures should be adopted to guard against monopoly.'

Now you see how I meant to work it. Why, gentlemen, this, as I ventured to tell the minister, is the best kind of socialism; and mere common sense into the bargain. But what a painful contrast is there between these admirably expressed ideals and the policy of our present governments!

Take the forests. 'We believe that systems of fire-guardianship

patrol afford the best means of dealing adequately with fires.' Only a few weeks ago President Van Hise of Madison University, an enthusiastic lover of our Canadian woods, told me that during an expedition in the North-West last summer his party had the satisfaction of extinguishing three incipient forest fires due in each case to neglect of stamping out the camp fire by some party ahead. One day they came up with the party. It proved to be—two firewardens going their rounds! There needs to be less politics and more regard for competence and character in these, as in all our appointments.

Again, with regard to water-powers, a vital question, for the wonderful abundance of our supply should make this country a new and smokeless Lancashire, the Commissioners say:— 'No rights to the use of water-powers in streams should hereafter be granted in perpetuity. Each grant should be conditioned upon prompt development, continued beneficial use, and the payment of proper compensation to the public for the rights enjoyed; and should be for a definite period only.'

Yet I was told a few years ago that here in Quebec we had given away for ever possibly the finest and quite probably the most easily available water power in the world—I mean that at the Shawinigan Falls,—to a company mostly with foreign capital, for a lump sum of sixty thousand dollars! It seems incredible. I can hardly believe it now, though I once took an opportunity of asking the late Hon. Mr. Duffy about it, and he confirmed the fact, justifying the act of the government on the ground that it was the only way to secure rapid development. Why, gentlemen, if this power had been held for the province, it might have been an endless source of public wealth; it might for instance have paid for our education in perpetuity.

Then as to the coal. At the recent meeting of the Mining Society one of the engineers present informed me that from 40 to 60 per cent of the total amount is wasted through reckless and hasty methods of extraction; whereas with proper care and patience the waste need not be more than 15 per cent. And when we get it out, look how wastefully we burn it. The engineer of the Lake Ontario once told me that she could make nine knots on twenty-seven tons a day; but that to get two more knots out of her required sixty-six tons. Three hundred and fifty tons must be burned to get the eighteen knots of the Etruria; for only three knots more the Lucania wants five hundred and five tons; and our modern monsters, like the Mauretania, for their twenty-four knots must be fed with a daily allowance of upwards of a thousand tons. You see how rapidly the consumption mounts up in proportion to the result attained, and all to satisfy a few people in a hurry. I know that many look to science to provide a substitute before the coal measures

shall be exhausted; but in my judgment science gives no hint of a time when energy in this portable form will not be a valuable and even indispensable pre-requisite of civilized life, and I think our descendants will have a real grievance against us for our barbarous prodigality. For I suppose you will not admit the Irishman's argument, what has posterity ever done for us that we should do anything for them?

But the greatest of Canada's assets is her unoccupied lands. Why are you in such a hurry to fill them up, often with the most unsuitable materials? You cannot be so much in love with our present organization of society, with its thin crust of blatant luxury floating on a volcanic mass of seething misery, that you should wish to see it multiplied without delay over the last remaining spaces of the earth. The report of the Pittsburg Charities Commission is painful reading. There you have a district marked by enormous and efficient production of wealth; but it results in a few great fortunes; and for the many nothing but grinding poverty, unremitting soul-killing toil, twelve-hour shifts, half the year therefore by night, with twenty-four hours continuous work once a week at the change; and, worst of all, pitiful child labour. Is that how you would see Canada prosperous? I cannot believe it.

What is the secret of our dismal failure to realize the high ideals so admirably expressed in the report of the Conference? I believe it is to be found in our over-haste to be rich. That is why we throw away our water-powers, squander our coal, and give up our timber limits to speculators with no thought for the future provided they can make money at once. That is why we pay five dollars a head to mythical steamship companies to fill up our North-West with the sweepings of Europe. I have no quarrel with business methods. They are good in their place. But this money-making spirit is encroaching on our higher activities. It captures our theatres and concert rooms, dictating what we shall see and hear: it grips our great newspapers and turns them to its own purposes, thus poisoning the wells of public opinion at the source; it even invades our Universities. And when a few great fortunes have been made and the millions are set to toiling, we are to fix our eyes on the display of the wealthy and call the country prosperous. To use a phrase of Dr. Macphail's, we are to *impute* the wealth of the few, like righteousness, to the many poor!

Now I am not setting these disagreeable considerations before you with a view to urging any counsels of despair. I am an optimist in these matters. I look for better things. In the course of a visit last summer to England I thought I saw many hopeful signs of a new spirit, not only among the younger dons and undergraduates of the universities, but among all classes with whom I associated. What do you say to

this incident? A question has been asked of the Prime Minister in the British House of Commons with regard to a forgotten prayer attributed to Archbishop Cranmer, and in reply he formally commended it to the attention of the nation. Let me read it to you.

"The earth is Thine (O Lord) and all that is contained therein; notwithstanding Thou hast given the possession thereof unto the children of men, to pass over the time of their short pilgrimage in this vale of misery: We heartily pray Thee to send Thy Holy Spirit into the hearts of them that possess the grounds, pastures, and dwelling places of the earth, that they, remembering themselves to be Thy tenants, may not rack and stretch out the rents of their houses and lands, nor yet take unreasonable fines and incomes after the manner of covetous worldlings, but so let them out to other, that the inhabitants thereof may both be able to pay the rents, and also honestly to live, to nourish their families, and to relieve the poor: give them grace also to consider that they are but strangers and pilgrims in this world, having here no dwelling place, but seeking one to come; that they, remembering the short continuance of their life, may be content with that that is sufficient, and not join house to house, nor couple land to land, to the impoverishment of other, but so behave themselves in letting out their tenements, lands and pastures, that after this life they may be received into everlasting dwelling places: through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Is not this significant? It is a prayer for landlords. But the plea for merciful consideration, for content with a *sufficiency*, applies to all classes. It is curious what different standards rule in different sections of the community. There is an evolution in our ideals, and we may already see in certain professions the first peepings of the tender shoots of a new morality above the hard crust. The clergy have always by courtesy been considered to sacrifice themselves and starve their families on a pittance for love of their work. A doctor would feel himself dishonoured if he withheld his services, at all events in emergencies, till he had exacted the largest fee his patient was capable of paying. I will not venture to trace the first stirrings of the higher conscience among the lawyers, though tactful research would doubtless reveal something. And you pay us teachers a high compliment by assuming that it would derogate from our dignity if we consented to accept a salary much more than would cover your cigar bills. It is only in the world of business that, as one of my young friends pathetically put it, 'you must always be scalping the other fellows.'

Besides, gentlemen, this game of heaping up millions beyond the dreams of avarice begins to show signs of being played out. Fifty years ago there was some glamour about the ambition to make a million. But

now the thing has been carried to an absurdity. We have seen one man make a thousand millions, only to find himself at the end a dyspeptic old gentleman whose name is become a bye-word over a whole continent. Another could find no better way of celebrating his eightieth birthday than by assembling the young men of New York and gravely holding up as their model, that he had not taken a day's holiday in fifty years, and had had his lunch brought daily to his office under a tin cover, so as not to have to leave his desk for a moment, or let a dollar slip! A third, to whom I am in private duty bound, has placed himself on record in print, that the man who dies rich, dies disgraced. He works hard to find ideas for getting rid of his riches, and, among other splendid acts, he has by a stroke of the pen lifted the burden of anxiety from the shoulders of a whole underpaid profession. And have we not in our midst another who, for the twenty years that I have known him, has lived as simply as a man can, and employed not only his wealth, but the great abilities which enabled him to acquire it, in showering benefits on our University, our Province, and the whole Dominion?

I do not despair of seeing a further step taken, when it shall come to be thought not quite the thing to make these great accumulations at all. The genius of our great captains of industry, our napoleonic financiers, must not be wasted. They must go on with the work that is their pleasure, but there are signs that they may come to be contented with what Archbishop Cranmer calls a sufficiency, and that after this they will stop grinding their employés, and devote the surplus as it comes in to the well-being of their fellow-workers, sharing the profits with them. Great experiments of this kind have already been tried. I call to mind Sir Titus Salt, the Cadbury, Mr. Lever, Sir Christopher Furness, and the Steel Companies. Higher ideals are evolving. Thirty years ago one of the young leaders of the Fabian Society—Mr. Sidney Webb, I think—poured scorn on the ideal of the middle classes, in the mid-Victorian period, which he described as the ambition to leave to their children what they are pleased to call a small competence or independence; that is to say, the right to be dependent and incompetent. I thought I saw in the old country last summer signs of a revolt among the young people from this particular ideal; an uneasiness at accepting from society that for which they give no service in return; a yearning desire among all classes, widespread to an extent that would surprise you here, for some better system. Who knows, gentlemen, we may even one of these days give a trial to Christianity itself. Oh, I know that we have fought each other for centuries about the doctrines. But no one can say the life has ever been tried except here and there among feeble groups whom the world regards as amiable lunatics. Our international

relations are not so much heathen as openly barbarous. Our commercial life is thinly disguised war, stripped of the trappings, the pageantry and the heroism that lend some illusion of dignity to the real article. Much of our high finance strikes an outsider as a kind of gambling in which you take the other fellow's money by means of inside information and packing the cards, conduct which would draw down disastrous consequences in the card room of any respectable club.

Understand me, gentlemen, I am not attacking individuals, but the system on which our modern industrial society is built. Our salvation at present lies in this, that men and women are for the most part so much better than any system they have yet devised to regulate their lives. With human nature what it is, I doubt whether, as individuals, we can do much more than we are doing. I once heard Professor Alfred Marshall of Cambridge, who is not only a great economist but a warm-hearted enthusiast, called on to give advice at a time of great distress during the dock strikes. He said that since he had taken his degree eighteen years before, he had not consciously given half an hour's serious study to anything that would not help him to form a better judgment on the solution of our social problems; that he began by regarding our current maxims, such as that you should buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market, as the devil himself; yet he had been forced back step by step, till now he did not believe you could substitute for that antichristian precept any other course of action without running the risk of doing more harm than good.

How then shall the great change come? Not by any cataclysm. That is why the most intelligent of the reformers call themselves Fabians. We must go cautiously, proceed by evolution and steady progress. As old John Milton said:—

'These things will be and must be; but how they shall be least hurtful, how least enticing, herein consists the grave and governing wisdom of a state. To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition; but to ordain wisely, as in this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably.'

What is needed, and what from all the indications I believe is coming, is a change of heart, nobler ideals, a new spirit. At present no man can afford to render a service, to make anything or set others to make it, however crying the need for it, unless he can see not only a return but a profit in his action. We cannot be content for ever with such a motive. Perhaps you think this Socialism, that word of ill-omen. But, properly speaking, it does not portend any scheme of upheaval. It means fellowship and brotherly helpfulness. In that sense I am a

socialist, and I believe that the good will that is in man will ultimately find out a way, and substitute an ideal of service for that of personal gain.

Meanwhile we can at least see that our system, such as it is, shall be administered honestly. For this we need an awakened public conscience. You may remember that when Herbert Spencer went on board the steamer after his lecture tour in the States, the reporters asked him for one final word to America summing up the result of his observations. He told them that what was wanted to make America great was public spirit, a sense of public duty. In England, he said, if a wealthy bank director on his way to business is overcharged a penny by his omnibus conductor, he will take the man's number and spend a couple of days, if necessary, to get the thing put right; and very likely write to the Times as well. It is a matter of principle. But in America you will not take the trouble. You can make far more money in the time, and so you suffer yourselves to be fleeced and overridden by your public servants. Eternal vigilance in small as in great things is the price of all that is worth having.

It is here that I think a splendid work is being done by your Canadian Clubs, where week by week you meet to hear questions of national import discussed from a high plane of national service. I have been happy at these meetings, for I think I see springing up here a strong body of public opinion which will have to be reckoned with in all that concerns Canada's future. You have a great opportunity in Canada, the last perhaps in the whole world for building up a new nation on nobler lines in a country suited to white people. See that it is not wasted.

Your president has spoken in kindly appreciation of our desire to share to the fullest extent in the life of the country during the twenty years we have lived here. When we came to Canada—observe that I use the plural form—we consciously and deliberately resolved to be Canadians to the core, and, however we may have fallen short of our ideals, the same spirit moves us to the end. And now that the time has come for us to creep into holes and go away home, do not suppose we shall not remain Canadians at heart. We have formed too many ties here, and though we live in the Old Country, our hearts' memories will often turn back to our life in Canada, and as we watch her great future developing, we shall remember with pride that we had a share in her pioneer days.

Let me speak once more to you as a Canadian. We love Canada on many grounds; for her outward beauty, first, for her great spaces and dazzling skies and her free air; for the royal purple of her autumn woods,

for the ermine of her snows, and the scattered diamonds of her winter nights; for the thousand leagues of her shining rivers, and her tens of thousands of happy homes amid the waving corn; for the strong cords of love she binds about our hearts to draw us back to her when we leave her shores, and for the wide arms of welcome she flings out to greet us when we return; for the work she has given us to do, and for the future she holds out to our children; for the many good friends we have made here—and for some we shall see no more. You and I, gentlemen, shall love her and serve her, and as her festival days come round, we will drink to her prosperity, with many a backward memory and many a forward-glancing thought into her great future that is to be; wishing to those of her sons and daughters who serve her truly, whether in war abroad, or in the higher offices of peace at home, due meed of honour; and for those who fail her in her need, who blench in her hour of danger, or pervert their public trust to their private gain, or in anything come short of their full duty to her, let us pray that their eyes may be opened, that they may have grace to see their error and to amend their ways, so that they too may not be ashamed among her sons when she enters into her kingdom.